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CO-CONSTRUCTED INTERPERSONAL
PERCEPTIONS OF SELF:
MEANING-MAKING IN THE ASTROLOGICAL CONSULTATION

A
THESIS

Presented to the Faculty
of the University of Alaska Fairbanks
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

By
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May 2001

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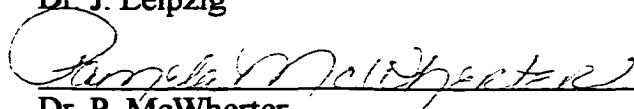
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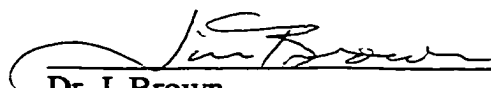


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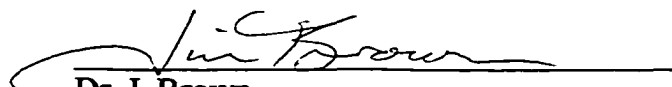
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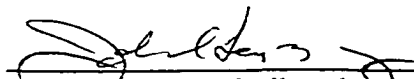
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ABSTRACT

This research study employs qualitative narrative analysis in order to develop an understanding of co-constructed meaning of self-identity within the astrological practitioner-client relationship. The literature review includes theoretical perspectives from interpersonal communication, the social construction of reality and of self-identity, and transpersonal studies. Three emergent themes from six narrative interviews are discussed in regard to co-constructed constitutive interpretations of self-identity: (1) cultural stranger/insider standpoint, (2) worldview metaphors, (3) and recognition of a socially embedded self. The consultation narrative illustrates the constitution of identity in interaction with an other who is afforded the status of "professional" regarding the interaction itself. Like therapeutic interactions between self and health care practitioners, the interaction between consultant and the astrological information seeker is a context unusually sensitive to the information that makes self visible to the evolution of identity. Such interaction carries a cultural expectation of the constitutive nature and power of communication.

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The mantra of Human Communication has become a deeply understood process through this work in meaning-making and will continue to inspire my academic career—all human reality is created, maintained, and transformed in human communication.

INTRODUCTION

The contextual belief system that individuals choose to practice self-reflection and self-understanding undergirds their perceptual framework of reality. One such belief system, the study and practice of astrology, is so specialized and technical in its practical application that individuals interested in utilizing this specialized form of inquiry must consult with an expert or study the subject themselves at great length. Astrology can be used as a tool by individuals seeking deep insight into self-understanding and the process of self-transformation. Consequently, very few people ever bother to study the subject of astrology in-depth, even if they are interested in utilizing the specific set of understandings about self and others that it can provide. Today, there are many sincere individuals committed to the study and practice of astrology. Astrological practitioners invest years of training to develop skills and a depth of knowledge in order to utilize the astrological language for interpretation of human developmental processes and human transformative experiences as well as for mundane purposes such as tracking trends in the stock market. Unfortunately, the general public is grossly uninformed as to the true nature and purposes of astrology. There is a common erroneous belief among the untutored public that astrology is simply one's birth sign (Sun Sign) or an amusing party game. The Sun Sign, which represents the sector of the Zodiac where the apparent path of the Sun passes during particular months of the year (from a geocentric perspective), is an integral aspect of astrological interpretation, though its symbolism and use is very fluid and far-reaching rather than merely a stipulation of a set of static personality characteristics. That particular misunderstanding of the use of astrological symbolism by

the general public has continued to pervert its intended application. The contexture of astrological symbolism is rich in metaphor and archetypal description and its use is designed to serve as a catalyst for insight and transformative understanding into human communication, relational interaction, and behavior. Others who are mired in superstitions from past and present so-called conventional and/or religious viewpoints, deem astrology as sinister, not worthy of practical use. Such negative beliefs stem from a lack of knowledge and misinterpretation of what astrology is and how it can be applied to an individual's process of self-development.

Astrology is an ancient intuitive human art and science whose roots are as old as the first humans who gazed at the bright lights in the night sky. Our ancestors made observations of the cyclical quality of the planetary bodies and eventually began applying human meanings to circumstances that coincided with these celestial events. The relevance and legitimacy of the interpretation of human significance to planetary cycles are not the focus of this study. Rather, the focus is on how individuals who choose to utilize astrology's rich, contextured symbolism to augment insights into self and others co-construct meaning. The astrological consultation, like the physician/patient interview, forms the framework for an interpersonal experience in meaning-making, which essentially is a purposeful practitioner-client communicative interaction contextualized by astrological significance in the construction of self.

CHAPTER I

LITERATURE REVIEW

The theoretical focus of this study is to create an understanding of how the co-construction of interpersonal communication in regard to personal insights gained through astrological consultation influences the construction of self. An exploration of communication and social science research was used as a framework for this study in order to embed the experience of an astrological consultation such as perspectives in interpersonal communication, which includes standpoint theory and Julia Wood's relational culture; the theory of the social construction of reality and the co-construction of the self and identity, which encompasses notions of the narrative construction of self and other in social interaction; as well as ideas from transpersonal studies.

In the process of interpersonal communication human beings not only derive a sense of self through interaction with social others, but are able to mutually affect each other in a transformative way. According to Deetz (1982), interpersonal interaction is the arena where "reality construction, confirmation, and transformation" take place (p. 2). The astrological consultation is an interpersonal exchange in which a very stylized version of social understanding is mutually constructed. An individual not previously initiated in astrological concepts and/or not involved in the actual communicative process of the consultation would essentially be a cultural stranger, an outsider. In this sense, astrological consultants acting as interpreters of geocosmic phenomena and their impact

on human lives need to be cognizant of their clients' level of astrological knowledge in order to facilitate the co-constructive process toward shared understandings.

Standpoint theory can provide a foundational theoretical perspective from which to ground an understanding of the astrological consultation as an interpersonal interaction permeated with a specified technical form of communication and assumed shared meanings. Standpoints, which are "reflections of social locations . . . shap[ing] how members think and perceive," determine the ease or difficulty inherent in meaning-making in interpersonal exchanges (Wood, 1996, p. 36). A practical application of standpoint theory in regard to the co-constructive interpretive process of an astrological consultation would indicate that any shared interpretations are dependent upon the congruency of the participants' standpoints (Wood, 1996, p. 38). A cultural stranger acting as a client in an astrological consultation, therefore, would have a two-fold dilemma at hand, the standpoint of being an outsider to the astrological language and the constructive application of an informed interpretive process toward authentic introspective insight. A cultural insider would obviously be in a strategically better position in regard to meaning-making in an astrological consultation.

Wood's theory of "relational culture" can also be applied to the development of shared meanings in the context of the cultural stranger/cultural insider, in that individuals involved in relationship, even in a therapist-client relationship, construct a "worldview imagined together which [they] agree to believe in" (Wood, 1996, p. 12). Relational culture adds two valuable concepts to the literature on interpersonal relationships. First, the idea of relational culture creates a conceptualization of how "distinct individuals are

transformed into co-actors with a consensually constructed social order" (Wood, 1996, p. 14). Secondly, communication becomes central in relational culture as a "process through which relationships develop and become substantive influences on individual attitudes, actions, and self-definitions" (p. 14).

An individual's self-definition can be dramatically transformed as the result of personal insights realized from information co-constructed in an astrological interaction. A personalized astrological reading is essentially a story, a biographical story, constructed of past and ongoing tensions and personal creative triumphs acting on an individual's intersubjective developmental process of self-understanding. Gergen's (1994) idea about self-narration as a medium through which people make sense of their lives suggests that identity evolves in a process of storytelling about the self and by others about the self (p. 186). An individual's ever-evolving identity is contingent upon "narratives of the self, [which] are not fundamentally possessions of the individual but possessions of relationships—products of social interchange . . . in effect, to be a self with a past and potential future is . . . to be immersed in interdependency" (Gergen, 1994, p. 186).

The meaning-making created in an astrological therapeutic interaction resembles Gergen's notion of self-narration acting as identity creation, in that a co-constructive process of storytelling and interpretation is being continually mediated through the communication between client and practitioner. According to Gergen (1999), the construction of self develops in synchrony with the "common understandings of our mental life, [which] are suffused with metaphor" (p. 70). A client can develop an in-

depth understanding of his or her identity through certain time periods or eras in the life as nuance of meaning emerges from an interdependent exchange of analogical, metaphorical storying from the epistemological perspective of astrological symbolism countered by client affirmation or denial.

Finally, a discussion of some of the ideas from the perspective of a transpersonal approach complements well the way of knowing embedded in an astrological interpretation of the process of self-development as a co-constructed endeavor. Transpersonal research, at its core, is all about "personal and social transformation" (Anderson, 1998, p. 87). Anderson suggests that in:

intuitive inquiry, [such as in an astrological inquiry], researcher, participants, and audience eventually work together to give expression to a comprehensive understanding of a particular facet of human experience. Everyone involved is changed in the process. Through time, all contribute to communicating and to being influenced and transformed. (Anderson, 1998, p. 87)

Transpersonal inquiry refers to researching "any experience that is transegoic, including the archetypal realities of Jung's collective unconscious as well as radical transcendent awareness" (Valle & Mohs, 1998, p. 99). Research inquiry utilizing an astrological consultation as the medium of inquiry falls in line with a transpersonal research approach as cited from the previously mentioned perspective. Unfortunately, there currently are few communication-based studies of transpersonal awareness from which to embed this study, though the fields of psychology and sociology have been enriched by many studies of transpersonal perspectives over the past few years. Communication scholar Bud

Goodall's (2001) ethnographic study of the ancient Chinese intuitive art and practice of Feng-Shui, or balancing physical/spiritual energy (Chi) for productive change in human lives, takes a look at a transpersonal perspective. In his discussion of Feng-Shui as an organizing tool in everyday living environments, Goodall (2001) urges his readers to "recognize that the point of offering Feng-Shui advice is to help a client build a narrative, symbolic corrective," which is similar to astrological advice (p. 10).

Astrological information and understandings are derived from a transpersonal perspective, beyond the self, though co-constructed interpretations become meaningful in the astrological narrative as the client seeks an understanding of some of the seemingly chaotic experiences and traumas experienced in everyday existence. Goodall (2001) speaks of the "ineffable," and the "inexpressible," in his article on Feng-Shui, by suggesting that "most systems of symbolic explanation, whether rhetorical, or magical, or interactionist, . . . must be rediscovered within a culture at a time when members of that culture are asking Big Questions, and searching for a new, unifying narrative" (p. 18). The astrological consultation, as a transpersonal interpretive tool for self-understanding, fits in well with Goodall's suggestion that human beings strive for an experience of the ineffable by locating themselves in some larger framework or narrative, even the "narrative voice of a skilled practitioner . . . can indeed be profound" (Goodall, 2001, p. 18). The utilization of a transpersonal approach to communication, as expressed through an astrological perspective, would indicate that in some constructed realities a glimpse of the ineffable is possible and becomes a rich, textured basis for a co-construction of self-identity between practitioner and client.

Three research assumptions were formulated out of the review of the literature. First, there is a co-constructive interpretive process involved in the relational interaction between astrological practitioner/client. Secondly, an individual not previously initiated in astrological concepts would be a cultural stranger. And finally, an individual's standpoint would influence the meaning-making process in the context of an astrological consultation and would serve to define the boundaries in which one embeds self-identity.

CHAPTER II

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study is to develop an understanding of how individuals make meaning of esoteric tools for self-evaluation and self-reflection such as astrological consultations with professionally trained experts and how the interactants within communicative interaction co-construct meaning. A narrative methodological approach was utilized to analyze collected data in this study, derived from narrative interviews. The narrative analysis of six individuals' stories produced the substantive themes used in the interpretations. These interpretations of lived experience are the “ultimate aim of the narrative investigation of human life” (Josselson, 1995, p. ix). In qualitative research, the interview is an effective research tool employed to collect research data. Kvale (1996) compares the relevance of the research interview with everyday conversational dialogue by asserting that the:

conversation is a basic mode of human interaction. Human beings talk with each other—they interact, pose questions, and answer questions. Through conversations we get to know other people, get to learn about their experiences, feelings, and hopes and the world they live in. There are multiple forms of conversations—in everyday life, in literature, and in the professions. Everyday conversations may range from chat and small talk, through exchanges of news, disputes, or formal negotiations, to deep personal interchanges . . . the research interview is based on the conversations of daily life and is a professional conversation. (p. 5)

A semistructured and collaborative interview technique with interviewees (co-researchers) was employed in order to have “[the] interview resemble conversations between equals . . . [allowing] most of what [was] said and meant by [myself and the] interviewee [to] emerge jointly in interaction” (Lindlof, 1995, p. 5). The interview, according to Kvale (1996), is a qualitative research tool worthy of the same scientific status traditionally afforded to quantitative research methods. In Kvale's in-depth interview research handbook, Inter Views: An Introduction to Qualitative Research Interviewing, he states that “today's social science students acquire professional competency in analyzing the social world as a mathematically constituted universe, but remain amateurs in the face of a linguistically constituted social world” (Kvale, 1996, p. 69). Kvale emphasizes the viewpoint that qualitative research methods utilized in science must meet similar criteria as quantitative research methods since a working definition of science states that science is:

the methodological production of new, systematic knowledge . . . Rather than dismissing commonsense understanding as unscientific, the conversations of daily life [are a] . . . context from which the more specialized scientific conversations are developed and to which they return. Systematic reflection on commonsense understanding and on ordinary language conversations may contribute to a refined understanding of a human world understood as a conversational reality. (Kvale, 1996, p. 285)

Denzin and Lincoln (1994) reinforce Kvale's viewpoint on interview research methods. The collection of data from interviews with research subjects satisfies certain

requirements of the qualitative approach, first by “capturing the individual’s point of view,” secondly by “examining the constraints of everyday life,” and finally by “securing rich descriptions” (Denzin and Lincoln, 1994, pp. 5-6). The information gleaned from the interviewees represents thick, detailed accounts of personal experience framed within the co-constructed quality of the astrological personal reading. The interview approach embodies an “emic [or inside], idiographic, case-based” view into real life experiences of the research subjects (Denzin, 1994, p. 6). The resultant co-researchers' narratives or conversations between interviewer and interviewees have been analyzed in order to identify how perceptions of self are co-constructed and meaning is made through the process of experiencing an astrological perspective of one's so-called blueprint of self-development, the birth horoscope.

The interviewer in the qualitative research perspective acts as a guide during the process of the interview, consciously and purposefully attending to all aspects of the conversational interaction. The interview researcher performs many roles in the actual interview, which can be understood as the development of Kvale's (1996) idea of "craftsmanship" (p. 105). According to Kvale (1996), the concept of craftsmanship frames the process of "interviewing . . . [as] a craft . . . [which] does not follow content- and context-free rules of method, but rests on the judgments of a qualified researcher" (p. 105). One of the interviewer's various functions is that he or she actually becomes the research tool by acting as the metaphorical "traveler" and recorder of events in the uncharted, lived world of the interviewee (Kvale, 1996, p. 4). The researcher's central role in the process of interviewing can create situational constraints. Specifically,

research questions act as the catalyst for the co-researchers' responses but the relational presence of the interviewer in the interaction and possible implicit research expectations may influence the co-researchers to limit their responses. This is an unavoidable aspect of qualitative research since researchers acting as interviewers cannot remove themselves from the research medium. A collaborative perspective on research methods would indicate that the interviewer and interviewee are indeed co-researchers.

Co-Researcher Interviews

Six individuals were interviewed in this study. Kvale (1996) asserts that "the number of subjects necessary depends on a study's purpose . . . in current interview studies, the number of interviews tend to be around 15 ± 10 " (p. 102). The interviewees must provide verifiable birth information, specifically, birth date, time, and place. An astrological birth chart (natal horoscope) and current trends analysis (present planetary cycles update) was prepared and interpreted for each participant by the researcher who is a Professional Astrologer. The astrological consultation required approximately one to two hours to complete. The co-researchers' astrological consultations were audiotaped for analysis, then were destroyed. Several weeks after the initial consultation, dependent upon the mutual convenience of co-researchers, each participant was interviewed individually regarding his or her experience in meaning-making from the personal information gleaned from the astrological consultation. The co-researchers for this study were selected according to preset criteria determined by the researcher: first, two of the six participants had never experienced an astrological reading nor used any type of esoteric tool for self-understanding, but were open-minded and interested in the potential

production of knowledge of self that an expert astrological consultation can provide; secondly, the participants who had never investigated any form of astrological or esoteric knowledge were willing to discuss their story of authentic personal insights gathered from the astrological interaction. The remaining participants have had some previous experience with and an understanding of the specialized information possible from an astrological consultation as well as from other esoteric type systems designed to provide personal awareness and insight. The existent astrological knowledge of the remaining participants ranged from an awareness and interest to the level of a practitioner. All co-researchers were assigned pseudonyms in the research analysis in order to be in compliance with ethical research standards of confidentiality.

A qualitative approach to interviewing was employed with questions being open-ended and semistructured in order to facilitate a relaxed research environment free enough for the interviewees to answer with their own narratives of lived experience. There was no schedule of questions asked, so that general questions regarding the co-researchers' narratives of insight and self-reflection from the astrological consultation could be told in their own thoughts and words. An effective interviewer probes for deeper information in the process of the interview in order to obtain authentic and more detailed responses from the interviewee's actual lived experiences (Kvale, 1996, p. 133).

An astrological consultation could be considered unconventional as a research study, therefore, an alternative methodological approach was necessary to render the relatively unstudied subject in a social science research context with the resultant research data translatable to others. Braud and Anderson (1998) discuss such alternative methodology

in their co-authored work, Transpersonal Research Methods for the Social Sciences: Honoring Human Experience, which outlines the use of transpersonal approaches to Social Science research, one of which is called Integral Inquiry. This method purports that the:

world of human beings and their experiences is multileveled and complex . . . to provide a faithful account of that world, research approaches must be correspondingly multifaceted and pluralistic . . . [where] the researcher explores a research question that has great meaning to the researcher and to the research participants. This, in itself, guarantees that the findings also will be salient, significant, and useful to future readers of the research report (audience) and will help advance the knowledge base of the scholarly discipline in an important way. (Braud and Anderson, 1998, p. 256)

Another transpersonal research method is called "Intuitive Inquiry" which can be used to explore "the most profound and inexplicable aspects of human experiences, including mystical and unitive experiences, experiences of transformation, extraordinary insight, meditative awareness, altered states of consciousness, and self-actualization" (Anderson, 1998, p. 69). An astrological perspective in knowledge creation emerges at the intersection between cosmic certitudes and socially constructed interpretations. The predictability of the planetary cycles around the sun, the patterns of solar and lunar eclipses, and the various other natural astronomical phenomena utilized as a basis for the construction of human meanings in the astrological perspective can be best understood in the context of this study as an intuitive transpersonal approach to self-understanding.

Intuitive Inquiry used as a social and human science research method is intended to capture and "to explore the full dimensions of human awareness and experience" (Anderson, 1998, p. 70). In this regard, Anderson discusses valid research methods from the transpersonal perspective as encompassing the:

heart of compassion as value and the principle of validation and consensus . . . [which both] bring a renewed intentionality to our sciences . . . compassion allows us to ask the most significant questions and guides our hypotheses and speculations toward rich and expansive theories regarding the nature of the human experience. Compassionate listening allows our research participants to speak to us freely and honestly about the depth and value of their human experience . . . From the viewpoint of everyday consensual discourse, validity concerns our capacity to relate accurately the fullness and richness of a given human experience. To portray something accurately is to relay it thoroughly and comprehensively . . . those experiences that seem sufficiently important to relate to others are often vivid, personal, and particular. Poetry, prose, and lyrics often speak artfully of these rich human experiences . . . validity in conventional . . . empiricism, typically reduced to tests and measurements, often obscures and trivializes a commonsense validity of just telling the whole truth of what occurred in lived experience. (Anderson, 1998, p. 71)

Anderson's research method of Intuitive Inquiry embraces the specialized quality of knowledge derived from astrological consultations. In order to be faithful to the lived reality of the research participants, the narrative methodological approach was selected to

give a comprehensive representation of actual astrological encounters which provides the context with which to embed the construction of self-identity.

An audio recorder was utilized to record the consultations and interviews for transcription and analysis. The research study and ethical considerations were discussed with the participants prior to tape-recording the consultations and interviews. In accordance with the University of Alaska Fairbanks Human Subjects Committee's ethical standards for research with human subjects, the participants agreed with and signed an informed consent form (see Appendix A). The consent form outlined the nature of the research study and ethical considerations such as privacy, confidentiality, and ensured high ethical standards in treatment of the research data utilized in the study.

Methods of Analysis

Transcriptions of taped consultations and interviews of all research participants provided the necessary research data from which to apply a narrative analytical process of interpretation. The narrative data collected from the semistructured, taped interviews and data from the astrological consultations were analyzed for information pertinent to the study as well as all emergent information that could shed light on communication processes that assist clients in their co-construction of self. The interviewees' understanding and use of their own personalized astrological information shared in the interviews was analyzed for commonalities in themes of meaning-making and co-construction of self as well as other significant emergent themes. The process of narrative analysis according to Lindlof (1995) involves:

the notion that meanings are continually constructed lies at the center of interpretive approaches in communication . . . how we describe the world constitutes what we describe . . . the researcher must decide what kind of author he or she will be, and what sort of story to construct of the facts of the case. (p. 24)

Identification of the salient themes and subsequent interpretation per each co-researcher narrative systematically transformed each story into a logical set of meanings. According to Kvale (1996), the intent of qualitative research interviews is to describe and interpret "themes in the subject's lived world" (p. 187). Analysis in the qualitative research interview involves an in-depth understanding of the interview process. The actual interview can be considered a:

form of narration . . . a continuation of the story told by the interviewee . . . a narrative analysis of what was said leads to a new story to be told, a story developing the themes of the original interview. The analysis may also be a condensation or a reconstruction of the many tales told by different subjects into a richer, more condensed and coherent story than the scattered stories of the separate interviews. (Kvale, 1996, p. 199)

The researcher as the interpreter in qualitative research utilizes, for deeper interpretations of meanings, methods, which have been acquired from an understanding of hermeneutical philosophy (Kvale, 1996, p. 201). In hermeneutical interpretation, the interpreter derives from texts deeper meanings beyond the actual words to "work out structures and relations of meaning not immediately apparent in the text" (Kvale, 1996, p.

201). The utilization of hermeneutical type methods, according to Kvale (1996), in qualitative analysis "requires a certain distance from what is said . . . recontextualizing what is said in a specific conceptual context" (p. 201). Substantive themes emerge from the interview data in the process of analysis, which are developed into a coherent story, the actual research analysis. Kvale's (1996) metaphor of a traveler aptly describes research analysts as co-creators with their subjects, who travel with the subjects and report their "meanings . . . and through interpretation construct elaborate stories" (p. 207). This process of going deeply into the narratives of the interviewees is an analytical strategy of the interview researcher who chooses to report themes from the actual lived experience of the subjects studied rather than to quantify their responses according to a researcher constructed instrument. The creation of an understanding of one's actual lived world is an aim of qualitative interview analysis, as well as the creation of theory, which can be useful when attempting to understand others in similar situations.

The combined qualitative research methods of narrative and transpersonal approaches allows the various audiences for this type of research to travel with the co-researchers into an area of specialized human reality construction that is rarely acknowledged by the uninitiated nor accurately understood. The thousands of sincere individuals who choose to utilize esoteric tools for self-understanding such as astrology are the voices who form a chorus of consciousness raising in human transpersonal potential and understandings. Research, such as an exploration into the co-constructed interpersonal perceptions of self in the astrological interaction, can unveil an authentic aspect of human endeavor through the stories and experiences of real people.

CHAPTER III

NARRATIVE PERSPECTIVE

When we tell other people about ourselves we share our perceived experiences as they are lived out in social interaction. Stories about the self "serve as a critical means by which we make ourselves intelligible within the social world" (Gergen & Gergen, 1993, p. 17). Our stories play out in vivid, sometimes animated detail our inner thoughts and social intentions as "our relationships with each other, . . . in narrative form" (Gergen & Gergen, 1993, p. 18). The structure of narrative self-accounts can be understood as the individual's socially constructed perceptions of self since self-narrative is always embedded in a social milieu. Gergen and Gergen (1993) argue that narrative accounts of self are "products of social interchange—possessions of the socius" (p. 18). The actual events in an individual's life are the basis upon which narratives originate. A story functions as "a mirror to nature" since the events in real life motivate the storytelling (p. 20). Self-narrative performs the functions of self-understanding and social conduct, making the process of self-construction a relational process rather than a solely self-realized process. The self, like the communication in which it is constituted, is social in origin.

A professional conversation such as occurs in a physician/patient or therapist/client relationship as well as in an astrological practitioner/client relationship is a site of ongoing mutual self-construction. The constructions of self in the professional relationship are made evident through the voices of the clients and practitioner, who both are involved in a process of "re-authoring" their self-identities (Shotter, 1991, p. 105).

Shotter suggests that clients' self-identities are "re-authored" from the perspective of "what to be" in life rather than "what to do" and "what they have been in the past, to enable them to face what they might be in the future" (Shotter, 1991, p. 105). The astrological practitioner/client relationship is similar to the therapist/client relationship in the regard that a client seeks to create a contextual understanding of the identity. The practitioner-client relationship forms a nexus of reciprocal identity edification. This co-constructive relational process represents a "joint authorship of a new biographical account" for the client so he or she can lay the foundation for healthier versions of self as well as for profound personal insights into past uncertainties, disappointments, and emotional pain (Shotter, 1991, p. 107). We are always in the process of formulating different versions of ourselves (not always apparently better versions depending on our circumstances) in order to maintain a sense of self-integration or a survival of self-identity. The role of the practitioner/client relationship in regard to the co-construction of self becomes more central to the mental and/or spiritual health of the individual when understood from the perspective of co-authorship of self-narrative.

In order to truly capture the lived world of individuals who have varied knowledge regarding astrological perspectives, a story must be told. Each person's story is delivered from a particular frame of reference, from a unique composite of personal experience infused with and mediated by social interaction. Regardless of the context, self-narratives reflect our specific cultural bias, our requisite knowledge or lack thereof, our feelings about self and others, and our strategies to preserve a known sense of identity. Harré (1989) in, "Language Games and Texts of Identity," refers to differing cultural

perspectives as beliefs that make it possible to lead a certain kind of life that excludes individuals from different cultural viewpoints (p. 23). A social constructionist understanding of his idea would stipulate that "we express in the rhetoric of belief part of the grammar of certain kinds of discourse" (Harré, 1989, p. 23). We use certain metaphors to talk about our actions and ourselves thereby creating texts of our identity. We, as humans, are social beings who through our texts of identity are informed and bound by social and cultural mechanisms. This very process of cultural belief and inherent linguistic strategies shapes our differing worldviews even in the sense that we each develop unique understandings of our own cultural beliefs. We each individuate culture through our interpretation of our own experience. We embed our unique and personal interpretations of the social world of others within the parameters of our own socioculturally imbued framework or our metaphorical *box*, as some would call it. Few of us rarely bother to take a journey outside the confines of our socially co-constructed points of view because it can generate much unease and uncertainty. The investigative social and human science researcher must routinely challenge his or her own recognition of cultural safety and identity comfort, as well as the comfort level of the various research audiences through the exploration of multicultural others.

Individuals who utilize astrological criteria to frame their interpretations of the social world could be considered by people invested in convention and Western cultural norms to be outsiders or cultural others. Their eloquent voices have been silenced in the scientific and academic community by individuals who allow themselves to be limited by their own socially constructed parameters. The narrative exploration of differing

viewpoints regarding the use of esoteric tools for self-understanding, such as astrology, can give voice to this specialized area of knowledge as well as shed light on the co-constructive interpretive process embedded in the communicative interaction between practitioner/client.

The tales to be told rely upon the voices of six individuals with various levels of knowledge regarding astrological understandings. Each individual story is unique and significant within its own specified cultural viewpoint. Two of the participants can be considered cultural outsiders since they know little or nothing about astrology. The remaining participants have either some or a high level of knowledge regarding astrological insights and interpretations. The six stories speak for themselves in regard to the value of utilizing astrological tools for self-understanding and the process of co-construction in the practitioner/client relationship. The co-researcher's astrological profile is added at the beginning of each narrative in order to create an astrological contextual analogue in regard to astrology's interpretation of the identity creation process for reader reference (see Appendix B for an astrological signs and keywords reference).

Helena's Narrative Interview

[Astrological Signature—Pisces Sun, Virgo Moon, & Gemini Ascendant]

Helena is a woman in her early forties who utilizes a wide-range of metaphysical understandings such as dream work and astrological symbolism in her exploration of self. She coordinates a doctoral program at a northern Californian university committed to the promotion of spiritual development and enlightenment. She is a gifted educator, speaker, and writer. Helena's journey toward creating and maintaining a sense of personal

wholeness and self-authenticity has led her away from the conventional educational programs in which she was trained. She is enjoying immensely the challenge of working in a field that is personally significant and that represents a path traveled by relatively few individuals.

In Helena's construction of self, she agrees that she has always been somewhat of a renegade, less likely to follow the pack. She reminisced in her interview about not reacting in a typical fashion to peer pressure such as when she chose to go to a spiritual retreat on the weekend that she was supposed to compete in a speech competition. In her own words, Helena describes her renegade spirit by stating that "I didn't care what they thought . . . the team coach said if I don't go to the regionals, I won't get my letter jacket . . . who wants a letter jacket? . . . it doesn't matter." She thought that a spiritual retreat would serve her better for the future than a material token from a competition. Helena has the placement of Mars in the 12th house in her birth horoscope, which in astrological interpretation means that it carries the symbolism that she would place priority on the pursuit of intangible, spiritual goals in life and that inspirational endeavors and dreams would play a substantive role in her work rather than conventional material goals. She contextualized this interpretation in her own life by stating that "when I do dream work, it's fascinating in that I do tend to dream about things that are happening to me so I can focus there . . . having a sense of a cosmological nature to my existence, I can view things with more non-attachment."

Another aspect of Helena's identity, which has been confirmed for her through an understanding of her astrological chart, is the fact that she emerges as a leader in most

social situations. She has the placement of her Sun in Pisces in the 10th house of her birth chart, which is considered a natural leadership position. Helena laughed when she told a story about always understanding this part of her identity: "It just doesn't matter what I do, I always emerge as the leader . . . that has happened since I was two . . . all I have to do is have a facial expression and people think I should know the answers and the plan." Helena realized during this discussion of her natural leadership tendencies that what rides in tandem with that quality is being in a position to be the recipient of much attention and admiration from others. She isn't always comfortable with the attention generated from her leadership qualities. Helena explained in her interview:

even when I don't try [to be a leader, I am] someone who gets a lot of attention [which] has generated incredible envy, primarily from other women because I think that women are silenced in this society and this is projected . . . because I speak up and I don't care [what others think] . . . women who know nothing but caring and can't say what they think [have] really lashed out at me throughout my life.

In the process of discussing these qualities she also was able to integrate aspects of her own cultural heritage that often act to subordinate the role of women. The astrological interpretation regarding her self-realized leadership and attention generating qualities helped her to synthesize these areas through her own narrative.

Helena works in an environment staffed by people who regularly consult astrological criteria for understanding of daily trends and personal challenges. She has recently moved into a new cultural setting having in the past worked in more conventional

educational environments. The enthusiasm and energetic approach to life, which her co-workers express daily on the job, has become a source of much amusement and wonderment for Helena. Her co-workers actually utilize the astrological language in their casual discussions during meetings such as somebody saying "Mercury is in retrograde; stay away from the Xerox machine today!" According to astrological interpretation, when the planet Mercury is in apparent retrograde motion, it is considered a time when relied upon tools and machinery of everyday life and simple interchanges with others tend to become problematical such as the breakdown of necessary equipment and confused or missed messages, to name just a few. Helena feels somehow rewarded to be in such a creative and productive environment where her "co-workers are more aware of metaphysical kind of things and are more energetic in that sense, . . . I can use that layer of meaning to explore circumstances that I might not have noticed otherwise." The additional contexture of others in her workplace possessing the ability to use astrological understandings as a normal aspect of everyday exchange has enabled Helena to feel comfortable about sharing on that level. The social confirmation of sharing symbols and speaking a common language was evident in her comments regarding the fact that she "can say, well, I'm having this aspect in my chart and people understand what I'm talking about . . . it's really wild!"

The spiritual side of Helena's life is extremely important to her and she tries to infuse it into almost everything she chooses to do in life. Sharing unique understandings of her study of culture and her lived world with others is a motivating force in her life. Helena understands that her security in her essential self and the way she has been able to

synthesize aspects of culture into her professional work is an intrinsic aspect of her spiritual process. Her narrative story reflects these deeply felt understandings:

I've had that real awareness of self . . . I've become so fascinated with studying culture because the human process of enacting reality—creating culture . . . is so powerful that even when I've been in my times of cultural delusion I've always had this sense of who I am and in a bad way that would often times make it more painful that I couldn't get out of the cultural stuff.

Helena constructs a sense of self that is understood as a strong-willed self, embedded in a web of pervasive cultural influences.

The proper use of astrological understandings is important to Helena since "it is only powerful if it's not superficial . . . if it's not a cursory treatment like in what's your sign." She has been able to evolve her use of astrology over time by indicating:

it's not anymore if something good or bad is going to happen to me—there's not this duality of luck . . . it's much more about the potentials that are there and that some form of energy is creating the potentials . . . you can be frustrated and that frustration could be a sign of something that is making you rigid.

Helena feels that this perspective helps her to be a "good teacher because I never believed that someone was not able to be a good learner . . . that's the talent in terms of doing the kind of work that I do—leading people to a place where they can be, [where it] is not all comfort, to help them see a better perspective." Astrological understandings combined with Helena's keen intuition provide the insight for her to create more meaningful

interpretations with which to create an authentic sense of self and to share that special sense of self through her teaching of others.

Sonny's Narrative Interview

[Astrological Signature—Leo Sun, Gemini Moon, & Sagittarius Ascendant]

Sonny is a man in his early thirties who has never been acquainted with any real understanding of astrological viewpoints in regard to self-understanding. He received his undergraduate degree from a Mid-western university in the U.S. and is in the process of completing a graduate degree with the dream of someday also attending post-graduate school. His hobbies include an avid interest in diverse kinds of music such as rock music and honky-tonk. During one period in his life, Sonny actually traveled with a punk rock group as their manager. He also has a committed sense of positive social activism as seen through his participation in service oriented groups in his community. Some of Sonny's favorite pastimes include socializing with friends and striking up controversial debates with whoever has chosen to challenge his sharp wit.

Sonny's sense of fairness in regard to interpersonal interaction seems to be a strong ethical perspective that guides his relationships. In his own words, he describes an egalitarian viewpoint: "I think that astrology like a lot of other immortality projects means a lot to people . . . I, for the most part, don't try to demean peoples' immortality projects . . . so are Neo-Nazism and cults . . . who are we to criticize? . . . so there's some ethic involved there." Skepticism, uncertainty, and realism appear to be foundational perspectives upon which Sonny embeds his self-identity. He offered an explanation

during his interview regarding his perspective on utilizing systems such as astrology by pointing out that:

what is real is what people believe is real . . . I believe in the philosophy that human beings don't very well accept their mortality . . . they can't accept that we're going to die . . . because we have that awareness, we create immortality projects . . . so that life will be worthwhile . . . when they are dead and gone they want to have mattered . . . they want to keep on living.

Another self-narrative sequence revealed his skeptical viewpoint in reference to astrological interpretive systems by reiterating his stance on human beings' ultimate fate of death:

well, I only know what I know . . . I'm just reading it at face value . . . all this means nothing to me. I think that astrology was probably in that same category as an attempt by somebody way back whenever somebody started reading the stars to try to make sense of life, which to me means to make sense of the fact we are going to die . . . for some bigger purpose . . . and I'm not sure that there is.

Sonny's reference to immortality projects stems from the ideas of Ernest Becker, who wrote the 1974 Pulitzer Prize winning book, The Denial of Death, and whose perspectives of life have greatly influenced Sonny's personal worldview (Becker, 1973, p. 121). He refers to Becker as "my main guy" and contextualizes his self-identity on many of Becker's concepts such as a healthy cynicism for immortality projects. Yet, Sonny insists that "Sonny decides what happens to Sonny . . . I don't think that astrology

determines anything about what I do anymore than I think that there is a god in heaven who will ever make a decision about me." Sonny rejects the view that immortality projects can be used for self-understanding, at least in reference to himself, and believes that adopting that particular perspective would be a surrender of his self-determination.

A process of social construction pervades Sonny's self-narrative comments since he admits that his frequent use of the concept of immortality projects was gleaned from his investment in the philosophical viewpoints of Becker. Similar to Harré's concept of how we use certain rhetorical strategies in creating texts of identity, Sonny is using a rhetorical strategy, a metaphor, to represent a belief or rather a non-belief in something, to restate and strengthen his concept of self. He perceives himself to be the sole determinant of his destiny, ultimately separate from any outside influence.

Due to Sonny's status of being a cultural stranger and a non-believer of astrology, many of the symbolic astrological references in his reading were unnoticed, unappreciated, or denied. Most often, the novice or untutored client has an expectation that the information given is intended as a static set of actualities, very fatalistic, with no modifying influences or degree of personal choice. Some clients who are unsophisticated in the intent of astrological indicators will tend to approach the astrological reading as if it were a psychic reading or extra-sensory perception, thus attributing abilities to the astrologer that are beyond the scope of any astrological consultation. Also, novice clients, especially individuals who believe that they disagree with the value of astrological information, tend to belittle or trivialize the information as it is given rather than reflecting on the wide-range of ramifications the symbolism may have in their lives.

A misunderstanding of these points is often an underlying factor in novice clients' misperceptions of the beginning experience of an astrological consultation. Many of Sonny's misperceptions during the course of his consultation were from the perspective of the cultural stranger. He offered very little self-disclosure in the process of the consultation, which acted to effectively reduce any clarifying co-constructed interpretations of symbolic placements in his horoscope. The impact of his lack of self-disclosure in the consultation was revealed during his interview when he said that the information given to him about possible tensions in his intimate relationship didn't seem to be true to him. However, he did confirm in the context of the consultation that sometimes he and his partner have disagreements about how much time he tends to spend with friends. The interpretation regarding the importance of friendship in his life was derived from the placement of the Mars in the 11th house of his horoscope, which, in astrological jargon, can be interpreted as the idea that friendships will play a central role in the person's life and may be an intermittent source of conflict in intimate relationships. Also, within this specific interpretation it was suggested that the impact of this tendency may be felt during an upcoming planetary transit of Pluto to his natal placement of Venus. A planetary transit is a predictive technique used in astrology for interpretation of life's challenges, in which current mathematical placements of planets are compared to mathematical placements of planets at birth setting up certain internal tensions or positive enhancements for change. So, his upcoming Pluto-Venus transit indicates a challenge in intimacy. He seemed to agree with this interpretation at the time of the reading or at least gave the impression that he could relate to the comments. Yet, in his interview he stated:

looking ahead at how the planets line up next year or two . . . something big is going to happen . . . more traditional astrologists might have suggested a divorce or some major hurdle in the relationship. Well, you could say that about anybody . . . there aren't too many relationships that every couple of years go through some kind of major overhaul or some kind of crossroads . . . in the spirit of dialectics, we're always in . . . flux and those kind of contradictions . . . so, I was thinking about my 8-year relationship and it seems like every 6 to 8 months or a couple times a year there are these pivotal issues that could go either way and for various reasons we resolve them so that we stay together.

Sonny doesn't view the astrological interpretation as meaning anything for him.

Although the discussion seemed to ring somewhat true to his life, he naturally dismissed the references to his current relationship because it did not fit in with his interpretive framework of self-identity. His framework of belief in reference to the life process is that human life consists of living in a "big wilderness . . . it is unpaved . . . there's not a path, there's not a sign, there's certainly not a road . . . you say that astrology reflects the life process, but I'm not willing to go there . . . even if it did, I would still think it was a coincidence." Sonny's belief system of the finality of physical death with life having no process other than to "eat, shit, reproduce, [and] die" served to squelch any interactive discussion of a spiritual process of human life. The fact that we spoke a different philosophical language and our worldviews culturally clashed allowed for the constructive element within the interaction to be focused only on reality maintenance of self-identity. We ended the interview with Sonny musing that "maybe I'll find out at

some point that I've missed the boat . . . or maybe I'll have a revelation regarding some immortality project someday . . . I just don't know what one it will be."

Diana's Narrative Interview

[Astrological Signature—Sagittarius Sun, Cancer Moon, & Cancer Ascendant]

Diana is a woman in her early fifties who utilizes astrological insights as well as other esoteric tools such as shamanic journeying to increase her sense of self-awareness. Her educational background includes an undergraduate degree from a prestigious Northeastern U.S. university and a graduate degree in Fine Arts. She moved across the country to the Pacific Northwest in her twenties and has made that geographical area her permanent home. Diana views her various interests and hobbies outside of work to be a clearer reflection of her interpretation of her own identity. Her employment allows her the support for the pursuit of personally significant life goals such as music, art, literature, and writing, all which serve to "feed her soul."

Diana first became interested in astrology and other metaphysical concepts as a result of listening to conversations between her former boyfriend and his best friend. She said they would get involved in intense dialogues about the nature of human knowledge and our place in the universe. She became intrigued by the content of the various esoteric studies, especially astrology, which they opened up for her and became a lifelong student of metaphysics and astrology. Diana has become quite adept with her abilities in this specialized arena. Although she does not practice astrology professionally, Diana is routinely sought out by others in her social circle to share her wisdom of astrological and esoteric knowledge.

Diana describes herself as being an empathic individual, one who is able to intuit others' feelings and desires. In her own words, she spoke about the process of creating and interpreting self-identity in regard to her empathic abilities, "It's been part of my goal to learn not to have . . . blinders on, happily as an empath, I really can see out of people's eyes a lot of times . . . I see emotionally out of people's eyes . . . I don't know, happily may not be the word, sometimes it is a very scary place to be." Diana's understood way of being in the world has formed the foundation of this aspect of her self-identity.

She utilizes the metaphysical symbolic language of astrology to give context and depth to her understandings of self, others, and events in the world. A candid remark made by Diana during her interview clarifies her attitude toward astrology's appropriate application, "astrology is always best understood in hindsight . . . where you see consistent responses to certain things repetitively, you start to understand what that . . . is." Diana was referring to astrology's understanding of the cyclical nature of the planetary cycles in our solar system as well as symbolic astrological indicators of an individual's ways of being in the world that often act as lessons in personal growth. The nature of metaphorical descriptive symbolism and prediction in astrology is to guide the individual toward a deeper understanding of self, a clearer sense of informed decision-making, and preparation for life's potential journey ahead. The astrological consultation in this sense serves to provide clients with a specialized context within which richer shades of personally understood interpretations and awareness become more meaningful. Diana confirmed this personal revelatory function of astrology's ability to plot out specific years within planetary cycles and progressions (techniques used in astrology to

describe one's life process similar to the use of a map or a model to conceptualize a particular process) by her self-reflective response:

The [progressed] lunation cycle just floored me, the clarity with which it pointed out [my process] . . . if you took a calendar of the years of my life and asked me to circle the years that indicated my life's mission . . . , activated, actualized changes . . . that's what came out of the lunation cycle . . . seeing it on a piece of paper and having those years pointed out . . . it was so clear . . . If you had randomly circled different years it wouldn't have worked . . . it was specifically those years [that] pinpointed the year I entered college, the year I [moved across the country], the year I changed professions forever, and so on. So, I found that very insightful. Any thing that helps me see the larger picture of my life is useful.

Shotter's ideas about an individual's self-identity evolving in a process of "re-authorship" within the practitioner/client interaction become more relevant through Diana's confirmation of the larger picture of her self-acknowledged life process (Shotter, 1991, p. 105).

During the course of the interview, Diana noticed that there was no need to explain every astrological reference in the dialogue. We spoke the same language—the symbolic ABC's of astrology, in which we were both fluent. Diana mused upon our common understandings by observing that "it's very relieving to be able to talk to somebody on that level . . . and not have to backtrack and explain what I am talking about . . . not having to metacommunicate . . . the quality of the information is richer for me because I

have this body of knowledge." As well as Diana's excitement about speaking the same language with a fluent other, she was elated with the confirming information given in the astrological consultation. In fact, her exuberance was so pronounced that she often interrupted the ongoing practitioner interpretations to interject her own enthusiastic observations of self. According to Diana, she was aware of this tendency to interrupt in order to self-express, "I listen very poorly, which I have always known . . . I was so excited with what you were telling me half the time that I didn't let you finish what you were saying . . . but, I was pleased that you and I could communicate on the level we did." Some of the areas that most confirmed Diana's perceptions of self were regarding discussions of her emotional sensitivity as symbolized by the Moon in Cancer on her Ascendant at birth in her horoscope. In the astrological language, the symbol of the moon, the lunar placement at birth, is contextualized as referring to and describing one's emotional perspective and foundation in life. The Zodiacal sign in which the moon is located at birth as well as the moon's orientation to earth's apparent rotating horizon and meridian lines play an integral role in formulating what is referred to as the astrological signature of an individual. The closer the placement of a planet, the Sun, or the Moon is to the horizon line (called the Ascendant/Descendant axis or the rising sign) or to the meridian line (called the zenith/nadir axis or the Midheaven), then there is a connotation of deeper intensity within the symbolism of the planetary placement and Zodiacal sign designation. Diana describes herself as a highly sensitive person:

the first time I ever saw my chart . . . seeing that I was a Sagittarius [which is considered a talkative, boisterous, and blunt sign] . . . I'm supposed to be [a

certain] way . . . there were whole parts of me that had nothing to do with that, then I realized that I had a Cancer Moon rising . . . I really do feel things more deeply than most people do . . . I will run from confrontation because . . . of feeling it more intensely . . . I am up at night worrying.

This sequence from Diana's interview reiterates and reinforces the astrological significance of the Moon in the emotionally sensitive sign of Cancer located on the eastern horizon in her birth chart. Her story about her own emotional sensitivity not only clarifies the symbolism of her particular astrological signature, but functions similar to Gergen's description of self-narration as being a "mirror to nature," in that we tell stories about our own lived experiences (Gergen, 1993, p. 20). In Diana's case, there is one additional dimension of her self-narrative, which is the augmentation of astrological descriptors. The astrological contexture of her self-description of heightened sensitivity can be understood as adding an intensifying aspect to the reflection from nature's mirror. Diana's chosen interpretive processes intrinsically form her understanding of her self-identity.

In regard to Diana's lived world, for over 30 years she has spent quality time looking at what she refers to as "spiritual mapping systems," which are systems that help one derive a more complete understanding of self such as utilizing astrology for self-awareness. A spiritual mapping system, according to Diana, is a way to comprehend the nature of things in one's life where one's "ultimate goal is to learn how to apply that kind of knowledge to life . . . it gives you a perspective that you don't have in a normal sense." As well as the astrological consultation providing a specialized vantage point from which

to study oneself, there is also an interactive process of co-construction taking place between practitioner and client. This layered contexture of meaning-making is aptly discussed by Diana in her interview as there is:

preassigned meaning to certain houses or aspects but . . . combined with [the practitioner's] intuitive knowledge of the specific reading, not only am I hearing the content of what [is said] about this aspect in my chart but I am learning how [it is] interpret[ed] . . . it's that whole other level . . . that's how I do that and I've never looked at it that way, so I'm getting that level also."

Diana refers to her use of astrology as a way to "go with the more organic flow" in her life rather than to "micromanage every little inch of things by that knowledge . . . where you are afraid to get out of bed without consulting something . . . then you have lost the spontaneity and the freedom that the system is trying to give you in a larger aspect." She contrasts her understanding of the appropriate use of astrology with individuals who take a fundamentalist approach to whatever spiritual mapping system they use by saying it's:

like any other study, you can take it to the *nth* degree and make yourself insane . . . it's the fundamentalist approach . . . they have to monitor every single action, word, step—everything they do in life in relation to that [system]. . . you can drive yourself nuts doing that . . . It's not my way . . . it doesn't mean the people who do that are wrong, they construct their meaning in life that way and it gives them a security and guidance . . . I like the illusion that I have some freedom in my life.

Diana's self-descriptions and self-understandings as told by her narrative story gives voice to those who choose to utilize astrological interpretive criteria as a "symbolic corrective" (Goodall, 2001, p. 10). The capability to contextualize the ineffable in a meaningful symbolic system such as astrology truly allows Diana the liberty to be empowered by that knowledge, which continues to assist her in the construction of socially and personally healthy versions of her self-identity.

Marsha's Narrative Interview

[Astrological Signature—Aries Sun, Pisces Moon, & Cancer Ascendant]

Marsha is a woman in her mid-twenties who has never had an astrological consultation or any understanding of its potential significance in terms of the development of self-understanding. Shortly after she received her undergraduate degree, Marsha took a year away from her educational pursuits to travel in France and Ireland. She returned to higher education after her trip abroad in order to complete a graduate degree. Her interests include collecting rocks and artifacts from the natural environs of her home territory in the Pacific Northwest, travel and tourism, as well as the warm camaraderie of close friendships.

The astrological consultation turned out to be an interesting and thought-provoking event for Marsha, even though she had never been introduced to the language of astrology. She would be considered a cultural stranger in regard to astrological concepts, but admitted honestly during the interview that:

I wasn't a non-believer coming in—I was really curious . . . and if something doesn't make sense to me, I ignore that and brush that one aside if I don't

understand it . . . not to dwell on it and try to figure out what it is trying to say about me . . . I guess it's about fluidity and not putting myself in a box . . . I take the parts I want and leave the parts that I don't want.

Her adaptability in regard to adjusting to a new cultural perspective was remarkable since she was able to easily apply the metaphorical nature of astrological symbolism to her own life rather than thinking in terms of predictive absolutes.

The co-constructed quality of the consultation and interview was addressed several times by Marsha through her self-narrative stories. One story in particular was evoked from an astrological reference in her horoscope, which indicated that there were no planetary placements in the Zodiacal signs symbolic of the element of earth on the day of her birth. The metaphorical symbolism of earth in astrology relates to concepts such as being grounded, rooted, growth-oriented, stable, practical, patient, and "in touch with the physical senses and the here-and-now reality of the material world" (Arroyo, 1975, p. 99). The astrological designation of "no earth" infers that the individual may have difficulty or so-called issues with the targeted areas in life such as coping with impracticality, impatience, or feeling "out of touch" somehow. The lack of earth symbolism in an individual's chart also sets up a metaphorical imbalance in relation to the other three elements of fire, air, and water. In order for the individual to feel whole and balanced emotionally, they tend to concentrate their focus in life on the missing element's attributes, even to the extent of requiring some connection with the physical element through artifacts or through people who have a strong earth emphasis in their astrological profile. A good example of how Marsha's missing earth element in her chart relates to

her real life is that her boyfriend is a Virgo, which happens to be an Earth sign. Marsha's unrehearsed reaction to the discussion of her lack of earth mirrors the profound nature of this symbolism in her formulation of self-identity:

There were some things that were shockingly accurate—the whole idea of me not having any earth and that people without earth would fill their lives with rocks and plants and things like that . . . my entire house is filled with rocks! And not having any roots . . . I have moved, I mean I have physically moved a hundred times within the same town. But, I've never left this community, so I feel rooted in the community, but as far as a home—I have lived in every neighborhood in this town. I have lived in over 25 houses between my family's residence and house-sitting and since I moved out of the family home, all the different places I have lived . . . sometimes for just a few weeks at a time . . . but that was my home base for that time. I can apply it as a metaphor . . . maybe it's because I don't know what rootedness is, maybe it's so foreign to me that I can't define it.

Marsha's ability to comprehend the earth metaphor and its sense-making led her to explore an aspect of herself that she might not have interpreted in quite that way such as what it might mean to her to be rooted.

Another important area of practitioner/client co-construction surfaced in the discussion in Marsha's interview, which related to the symbolic information pinpointed from an astrological technique called "astrocartography" (Lewis & Irving, 1997, p. 5). This technique identifies an individual's personalized meridian and horizon lines across

the world, which are considered specific geographical areas of personal empowerment. Marsha has a line running vertically through Texas very near to where her grandparents live. Her enthusiastic remarks disclosed the intensity of this co-constructive sequence:

One thing I really took to heart, the cartography parts that ran through Texas . . . my grandparents live in Texas right about where that line goes through. And all of a sudden, I have this great desire to go to Texas! . . . it's pretty tortuous to go there and sit with my grandfather for three days and talk about laundry . . . we go see my grandmother every day at 4 o'clock and she doesn't respond to us . . . she has Alzheimer's . . . But all of a sudden I have this urge, I need to go back to Texas to see what this is all about and see if I feel different or bring some things home from Texas.

Marsha's planned trip to see her grandparents appears to have taken on an air of self-discovery or to reiterate Shotter's reference to clients' "re-authored" sense of self-identity, which "enables them to face what they might be in the future" (Shotter, 1991, p. 105).

Marsha shared the fact that her parents had divorced when she was a junior in high school. She remembers this time period as being one of several years in a row that was extremely difficult in her adolescence. There was an astrological turning point in her chart's progressed lunation cycle during the onset of those years, which symbolized a major transition in regard to her emotional development. An astrological interpretation of the symbolism in her chart indicated that her lunation cycle was reflecting an emotional process that she now realizes was intrinsically linked with her reactions to inadequate parenting from alcoholic parents. The subsequent turning point in the

lunation cycle took place eight years later when she traveled in Europe. According to Marsha, she had an epiphanous turning point in her emotional development during the trip that led her to fill a void she had always felt:

. . . that was very significant going on that trip. Ireland, for some reason was this really big draw for me, I always needed to go there, so I went and I had an amazing time. I had a really life altering sort of experience there. Not for any [particular] reason or that I met somebody, but it just has to do with waking up in the morning, actually, I was staying with these people in a house . . . waking up in the morning . . . I was in some kind of feather bed or a bed with a huge comforter on top . . . it was right by this great big window and the sun would be shining in and the birds would be out there . . . I'd wake up and there would be cereal on the table waiting for me . . . I guess maybe just the home life I'd always been wanting and it was right there . . . these people didn't even know me. They had eight kids in the family but five were home and we would play basketball or we'd do this or that and that's what it was for me. How I knew, or maybe this was a coincidence, but how I knew that would be in Ireland for me . . . it seemed like I so needed to go there and that's what I found.

She had corroborated the definition and significance of her personal lunation cycle through her self-narrative. Her trip to Ireland became a two-fold process—a metaphorical journey of self-identity as well as a move toward a more integrated, nurtured sense of self.

Laurel's Narrative Interview

[Astrological Signature—Taurus Sun, Pisces Moon, & Sagittarius Ascendant]

Laurel is a woman in her mid-forties who possesses an in-depth understanding of astrological symbolism and the use of other esoteric tools in the process of personal growth. After receiving her undergraduate degree while still in her twenties, she turned her attention to holistic healing arts and metaphysical frameworks of understanding human life. Laurel embarked upon a journey of self-discovery in order to heal herself from the wounds of a painful childhood. She activated an urge to serve others during this intense phase of spiritual self-development, which became for her a committed recognition of her life's work. Laurel studied therapeutic massage designed to facilitate the emotional/spiritual healing process within the individual. She became a practitioner of therapeutic massage making that her main source of income for over fifteen years. As Laurel entered into her forties, she became aware of a gnawing sense of restlessness, dissatisfaction, and limitation regarding the way she had structured her healing work with others. As a result, Laurel returned to school to complete a graduate degree in Social Work in order to fulfill her goal of becoming a licensed therapist. She has actualized a specific dream and goal of being able to blend her many years of dedicated holistic healing service to others with the addition of licensed therapeutic counseling, so that she can continue to expand the scope of her healing practice.

Laurel's understanding of the language of astrological symbolism is highly fluent, which provides her with an empowering philosophical framework with which to explore her own path of self-awareness as well as that of others. Her self-narrative in the

interview described her specific application of astrological concepts in her emotional self-healing process:

Astrology validates what I am going through, I don't feel so crazy. I'm more aware of and conscious of what is going on. It's an advantage, especially, about the time frame—'oh, it's going to be over!' . . . I try to see the archetypes of the transits, not thinking of them as being negative, but being aware that there are some negative manifestations that happen but also thinking about how can this [specific astrological symbolism] be manifested positively by working it out consciously. So, [as an example], Saturn is going to square my Moon—I could become really depressed or I could also see it in a way that gives structure to my emotions or I could apply the symbolism in a number of ways . . . I have control of my thoughts and don't have to feel victimized by my circumstances . . . instead of going into the depths of despair, I can understand it use as a learning tool.

Laurel's self-narrative unpacks the appropriate use of astrological techniques for understanding self-growth and serves to give a glimpse of the evolution of her self-identity formation, which has been contextualized through her internalization of metaphysical perspectives. Laurel's specialized cosmological beliefs have developed over time through intense study and self-reflection, though those beliefs and interpretations are always embedded within a cultural framework, albeit to some readers, an unconventional social framework. Goodall (1990) frames knowledge of self as "viewed dialectically . . . [is] never achieved alone . . . the self is not presented to the

world in isolation but in consort with other selves . . . the base for whatever empirical, behavioral, or internal states are used to describe a self . . . is always interdependent with knowledge about others" (pp. 266-267). Laurel has purposefully immersed herself for years in the company of other individuals who pursue goals of spiritual enlightenment through the understanding and application of a metaphysical worldview.

In regard to a co-constructive interpretive process within the astrological consultation and the interview, Laurel was able to overlay her experience of growing up in a dysfunctional family within the astrological context of the progressed lunation cycle. This cycle highlights specific years as pivotal turning points within one's emotional growth process. According to Laurel, her understanding of the co-constructed discussion of the cycle, within the astrological consultation, gave her a specific context within which to interpret her journey toward a healthier version of her self-identity. Laurel's own words articulate in almost poetic form her emotional release from past regrets through a reconstruction of the impact of negative memories:

I used to think I was cursed . . . but now I know that [my circumstances] are what made me who I am. I can see my power in the way that it worked. I am empowered rather than being victimized by it continuously. I so believe in the [emotional growth process reflected in the] cycle . . . I know what brought me here. What brought me here is all the pain of my wound—it was my mom that wounded me and helped make me be who I am. And I wouldn't be this person without that wounded part where I took action to heal. So, it became my armor

and my strength rather than my weak spot. I see it in my chart and I can see myself in a larger perspective.

Laurel interpreted her experience toward healing by integrating the structural timing of events as understood from an astrological interpretive viewpoint regarding the challenges reflected through the progressed lunation cycle. She could understand how her experiences during the turning points within the cycle as interpreted through the astrological consultation had laid a foundation for her eventual transcendence toward a positive sense of self-awareness and wholeness.

Chorie's Narrative Interview

[Astrological Signature—Gemini Sun, Pisces Moon, & Pisces Ascendant]

Chorie is a woman in her mid-forties who has studied astrology and other metaphysically oriented topics over the years on her own. She is an American citizen who was born in Southeast Asia, which has played a role in situating her on the boundaries between two opposing cultural belief systems. Her family's cultural perspective is derived from a Western, individualistic way of being, but her early experiences of being embedded in a collectivistic cultural system in Southeast Asia has profoundly influenced her worldview. She literally has a dualistic cultural framework assisting in her development of self-identity. She admits that an identity crisis was enacted in her teenage years as the result of her family's return to the States because her experience of the way people interacted in Southeast Asia was so foreign to the way people interacted in the U.S. Some of the cultural beliefs derived from the Asian influence in her upbringing such as viewing human life as a part of the natural rhythm

within the universal scheme of things has led Chorie to study differing cultural belief systems and family systems. She is working on a graduate degree with the intent of applying her expertise to working with teenagers. Some of Chorie's other interests in life include a love of dancing and the use of natural and herbal healing strategies for health and well-being.

Her self-identity has been constructed through a deep appreciation of the natural ebb and flow of transitions in human life. Chorie's self-narrative description exemplifies her understanding of the process of self-awareness and personal growth from an astrological perspective:

If you put words to something it makes it easier to deal with . . . that's what astrology does for me. It's a way for me to find hope—that this [difficult time] is not going to last forever and is merely a transitional part in my life . . . it's going to end soon . . . [since] life has its ups and downs. I don't believe that we are in this life to be punished. I believe we are in this life to learn and so this is part of my learning process.

She has been able to adapt to the challenges in her life through utilizing astrological knowledge to assist in her self-interpretations. Another example of Chorie's view regarding the use of astrological criteria in her assessment of self describes how integral this perspective is to her worldview:

I see life in patterns and I believe that these patterns are consistent . . . [they] get repeated over and over again. How are you going to argue with a mountain? It's just there. It's a given. How are you going to argue whether the mountains are

there or not? It just IS! . . . astrology is a really good medium to explain what I see happening on the earth . . . whether that's real or true, I don't care, it's immaterial—it's a moot point. We are humans and we have to explain the world in ways that we can understand it.

For Chorie, the fact of whether or not she believes in astrology is not the question, she sees the natural rhythms of life and in the universe as tangible processes, which are just as clear as structural reality is in our everyday experience of the world.

An area of co-construction was developed for Chorie in the dialogue of her consultation when it was mentioned that she had a problematical emotional issue with her father and/or male authority figures. She confirmed this evaluation in the consultation and later in the interview reflected on the depth of meaning this had for her by connecting it with an image she had during a moment of self-realization:

I am discovering that I can't fulfill my purpose if I'm not fully me. One of my quests over the last several years is learning to become fully me instead of this person that my parents think I should be or those that love me think I should be. You talked about a karmic issue with my dad. That's it exactly, my dad had no idea who Chorie is, absolutely no idea about any of his children. We are . . . just the amalgamation [known] as 'the kids' and I realize that doesn't necessarily need to define me . . . a great deal of my issues about relationships with men . . . are about my father . . . I had this weird picture in my head regarding [my former husband] years ago. I saw him standing there and it was like my issue was with him, but then I saw this entire line of men all the way into eternity,

these shadows. I realized that my issue was not just with him but was with my father and male authority and that whole patriarchal bullshit.

The contextual frame of the astrological interpretation regarding difficulty with male authority figures triggered a profound recollection of a past intuitive self-recognition, which reaffirmed this understanding for her. Chorie has been profoundly moved by the overlapping of her own intuition with an astrological interpretation to an area of her life that she feels has required in-depth self-reflection and self-healing work. Her self-narrative metaphor (the image of a long line of men behind her father and husband) helped to create a context through which she could interpret herself more clearly.

Narrative Summary

The six excerpts from the co-researcher's narrative interviews have been presented in a way that has attempted to faithfully represent aspects of how each individual constructs their use or non-use of astrological methods for self-reflection and self-understanding. It has been argued previously that stories about the self can assist people in rendering themselves as understandable and intelligible to self and social others and that all such human knowledge is socially constituted (Gergen & Gergen, 1993, p. 17; Gergen, 1994, p. 201). In the interaction of an astrological consultation and narrative interview, each co-researcher was able to explain aspects of self-identity through a contextualization of socially created cultural interpretations and understandings. Their epistemological understandings influence their worldviews in ways that serve to help them create and recreate their interpretations of self-identity in the process of communicating their personal stories to others. Shotter's (1991) concept of the "re-authored" self in

conjunction with the practitioner/client relationship enacting a "joint authorship" grounds the narrative perspective as a co-constructed process (p. 105-107). In addition, Harré's ideas about the "grammar of certain kinds of discourse" framing the parameters of our identities helps to remind us that our self-identities are formed out of our cultural and social interactions. The structure of the "box" in which we contain our individual interpretations of our social world influences our mobility in regard to being able to truly communicate with others by "speaking the same cultural language." Through the six self-narrative stories discussed in this study, the constructive, constitutive power of a "mirror to nature" has been offered regarding the co-constructive process of interpretation in the astrological practitioner/client relationship (Gergen & Gergen, 1993, p. 20).

CHAPTER IV

NARRATIVE ANALYSIS

Narrative analysis, at its core, is about selecting, organizing, and interpreting the most appropriate and salient information from the lived experience of people in the real world. Mishler (1999) refers to our self-narratives as "identity performances [in which] we express, display, make claims for who we are—and who we would like to be" (p. 19). The narrative researcher must make a concerted effort to be fair and accurate in his or her analyses of individuals' accounts of self in regard to the synthesis of their displays of self-identity. In this sense, narrative analysis must employ what Denzin (1989) refers to as:

descriptive realism, which is dialogic and polyphonic . . . it tells the native's stories in his or her own words. It allows interpretation to emerge from the stories that are told. It reveals the conflictual, contradictory nature of lived experience and suggests that no single story or interpretation will fully capture the problematic events that have been studied. (p. 136)

Special attention must be paid as well to the "inherently indexical" quality of the narrative discourse because "meanings in discourse are neither singular or fixed, as they are . . . in a closed set of mathematical axioms and theorems . . . rather, terms take on specific and contextually grounded meanings within and through the discourse as it develops and is shaped by speakers" (Mishler, 1986, p. 64). Although transcriptions of narrative interviews were utilized in this research to provide the data upon which to explore the co-constructive interpretive process in the practitioner/client relationship, Kvale (1996) urges narrative researchers to "beware of transcripts . . . interviews are

living conversations" which deserve clear and consistent analytical strategies in order to render an accurate thematic account of authentic lived experience (p. 182). These specialized strategies of narrative analysis include ideas such as "entering into a *dialogue* with the text, . . . into an imagined conversation with the [co-]author[s] about the meaning of the text, . . . [thereby] seeking to develop, clarify, and expand what is expressed" (Kvale, 1996, pp. 182-183). Narrative analysis from this particular stance involves a recontextualization and a reconstruction of the interpretations derived from the emergent themes in the interview data.

Themes naturally arise from co-constructed interpretations and reconstituted understandings in the interview text during the process of final analysis. There are significant questions to attend in an analysis regarding the representation of the thematic reductions from the interview data such as: "Whose voice is represented in the final product; how open is the text to other readings; and how are we situated in the personal narratives we collect and analyze?" (Riessman, 1993, p. 61). The voices of the interviewees or co-researchers were purposefully placed in the foreground first in the discussion of the narrative interviews so that there would be little or no self-reflexive distraction from my voice as the researcher in the flow of their stories. My voice as the researcher and astrological consultant was not in the forefront of the selected narratives of the co-researchers, but was an integral and interactive element in the co-constructive meaning-making of the dialogues and could be found, only with careful analysis, embedded in the co-researchers' stories.

An Analysis Augmentation: Pilot Study Emergent Themes

A pilot study was an additional analytical strategy applied in this study, which functioned to lay an authentic foundation for a synthesis of thematic structures from the six narrative interviews. The initial pilot study was performed to explore the feasibility of capturing relevant emergent themes for a larger, more involved study regarding the co-construction of self as interpreted in the astrological practitioner/client relationship. The pilot study involved the use of an interview case study of a single individual who was a skeptic and a cultural stranger to astrological viewpoints.

Three repetitive themes emerged from the pilot study data: first, the theme of non-believer and cultural stranger in which the co-researcher's standpoint placed limitations on and influenced the co-constructed meaning-making process within that interaction; secondly, there was a theme regarding the need for consistent meta-communication between practitioner and client in order to co-construct from clearly differing worldviews; and finally, the interviewee's theme of surprise about the apparent accuracy of the astrological information and the countering discounting strategies used in regard to the validity of astrology. A communication approach to the co-constructive process between astrological practitioner and client would usually imply that there are shared meanings inherent in the interaction. What emerged from the pilot study was that there were no shared or agreed upon meanings in regard to an astrologically interpreted perspective. The interviewee's non-believing in support of a familiar identity/self and reality non-belief status seemed to direct the flow of information in the exchange toward a vantagepoint from which the foreign information could be controlled and digested.

What emerged in the co-constructive process of the pilot study was that each participant in the dialogue continued to assert his or her own belief system throughout the interaction. The case study was provocative in regard to the meaning-making process, especially in the exploration of how non-believers interpret and co-construct unfamiliar cultural messages as cultural strangers. As a result, the decision was made to complete a more in-depth study, capitalizing on the "craftsmanship" (Kvale, 1996, p. 105) lessons from the pilot interview.

Narrative Emergent Themes

According to Owen (1984), a theme in relational discourse emerges when three indices are evident: recurrence of meanings, repetition of words and/or phrases, and forcefulness of vocal inflection or emphasis indicated in the written text (p. 275). Owen's three indices were consistently applied to the research in final analysis of the data from the six narrative interviews in order to identify thematic patterns in the data, which organized the stories into a coherent whole. Polkinghorne's (1988), ideas about narrative interviewing and thematic reduction reinforce this notion of coherence within the narratives because "people strive to organize their temporal experience into meaningful wholes and to use the narrative form as a pattern for uniting the events of their lives into unfolding themes" (p. 163).

Several repetitive themes and sub-themes from the narrative stories of all six co-researchers emerged naturally in the process of the final analysis. The theme of the cultural stranger/insider standpoint, which had emerged in the initial pilot study, re-emerged in the interviews through the frequent references from interviewees regarding

the ability to speak or not speak the same language. The individual's cultural standpoint or degree of familiarity with an astrological interpretive system played a role in enhancing or hindering the co-constructive meaning-making process in the interaction. According to Wood (1995), the interpretive system we use in our communication with social others is indicative of our standpoint; however, "how others interpret our communication may not parallel our meanings for it" (p. 77). Her perspective centralizes an interpretive point of view as the basis of co-constructive meaning-making in our communication interactions with others. Each co-researcher used metaphors to describe personal worldviews and philosophical frameworks within the communicative interaction. An underlying sub-theme of the worldview metaphor theme had to do with creating a sense of comfort for self-identity or to maintain a sense of continuity with one's known reality, which involved assertions of self-identity by the interviewees in confirming or disconfirming communication about astrological descriptors and interpretations. Finally, each co-researcher repeated emergent themes of being cognizant of the self within a social medium in reference to others' reactions to and influence on self-identity.

A final synthesis of the various emergent themes and sub-themes served to reduce and refine the thematic structures into concise units, which could easily be applied to the narrative stories. Three themes were distilled: (1) the theme of the cultural stranger/insider standpoint, (2) the theme of worldview metaphors, (3) and the theme of the recognition of a socially embedded self. Many renditions of these three emergent themes were pervasively enacted throughout the narrative stories of each co-researcher.

Cultural Stranger/Insider Standpoint

People who utilize astrological interpretive systems to assist in their formulations of self-identity form a substantial sub-culture in the U.S. One can simply look up astrology in the yellow pages of any large metropolitan city telephone directory and find a long list of astrologers. For most individuals in our society, the application of astrology to interpret human endeavors and social interactions is considered odd, esoteric, or unusual, because most mainstream interpretive frameworks do not include this particular viewpoint. Interpretive perspectives that exist outside culturally understood norms and rules tend to be discounted and/or easily misunderstood because there is no overlap between the "implicit theories that individuals use to guide their communication" (Gudykunst, Ting-Toomey, Sudweeks, & Stewart, 1995, p. 44). In this sense, we can consider people who use astrological interpretive systems to be members of a distinct culture—a culture with its own symbolic and interpretive language system, norms, and rules.

Four of the co-researcher narrative interviews were with astrological cultural insiders; the other two narrative interviews were with cultural strangers to that interpretive system. Themes regarding cultural standpoint easily emerged from the co-researchers' narratives. The narrative comments of cultural insiders often confirmed their interpretations of comfort and ease regarding being able to talk about astrological concepts with other cultural insiders. Examples of the cultural insider theme can be understood from Helena's narrative interview about "getting to work in a place where I can say, well, I'm having this aspect in my chart and people understand what I'm talking

about;" or in addition from Diana's narrative comments regarding her relief "to be able to talk to somebody on that level about [astrology] and not have to backtrack and explain what I am talking about—not having to meta-communicate;" as well as from Laurel's narrative comments, "it helps when you were talking about [the cycles] again . . . it reminded me of how much I already understand." The communicative ease of the co-researchers regarding being cultural members was easily understood through their comments.

Confusion or misunderstandings often are part of the dilemma of being a cultural stranger. Communication is always problematical between individuals who do not speak the same language or interact through shared systems of understanding. Varner and Beamer (1995) indicate that in the process of communication with multicultural others, "the more you understand of another culture, the closer your schema will be to the reality that is the other culture . . . you will have fewer misunderstandings of the kind that arise when messages are assigned different meaning" (p. 22). It would be reasonable to make the assumption that if one's cultural schema is foreign to another individual's cultural schema, then miscommunication is more likely to occur. Sonny's comments from his narrative interview illustrate this idea regarding his response to looking at the mathematical notations on his astrological chart: "I would have no idea what this means . . . all this would mean absolutely nothing to me . . . well, I don't know this language, I know these characters mean something to somebody but they don't mean anything to me . . . it depends on where you are sitting, I guess." He was confused by the mathematical context of astrological signs and symbols and to him it all appeared to be gibberish. How

else could he interpret the charts and symbols used in the astrological language without an understanding of their cultural meanings? Sonny's interpretations of his experience in an astrological cultural context were consistent with the cultural stranger dilemma—meaning-making was hindered by not understanding the language; not sharing an experiential context of co-creation of meaning.

Although Marsha was a cultural stranger to the experience of an astrological framework, her existing interpretive schema appeared to overlap somewhat with astrology's "foreign" cultural interpretive framework. She indicated in her narrative that "I wasn't a non-believer coming in—I was curious . . . and if something doesn't make sense to me I ignore that and brush that one aside if I don't understand it." There is a process involved in "intercultural immersion experiences," commonly known in social and human science as "culture shock," which addresses four overlapping stages of intercultural adjustment: euphoria, disillusionment/frustration, adjustment, and integration (Varner & Beamer, 1995, pp. 10-11). Marsha's reactions toward her unfamiliarity with the astrological language mirrored this process in the sense that she was enthusiastic and "curious" about the astrological experience and made ongoing interpretive choices of adjustment to foreign concepts by simply "ignoring" or "brushing" them aside. Her apparent curiosity and capacity to utilize a more flexible and adaptable interpretive viewpoint enabled her to develop an understanding of some of the co-constructed meanings from her astrological consultation and interview.

Worldview Metaphors

Kvale (1996) asserts that themes in narrative studies are "more easily understood and remembered when worked out into vivid metaphors . . . [where] one kind of thing is understood in terms of another" (p. 275). The use of metaphor is a "data-reducing and pattern-making device" in narrative research studies (Kvale, 1996, p. 275). Metaphors can serve a dual purpose for the narrative researcher by acting as an organizational framework to unify the various themes in co-researchers' stories and by identifying possible interpretive mechanisms involved in the creation of one's self-identity. Themes of personal theories regarding interpreted viewpoints of the world emerged from the co-researchers' narrative interviews. These autobiographical narrative descriptions of personal identity form a thematic concept—worldview metaphors. Worldview metaphors in self-narratives are discursive mechanisms that individuals use to attempt to describe and explain themselves to others. Autobiographical accounts are used for identity construction and continuity of the self-concept over time where aspects of personality are negotiated and constructed discursively through the process of social interaction (Alasuutari, 1997, p. 7). In this sense, the six co-researchers expressed their unique interpretations of self and others through their worldview metaphors.

Diana used a worldview metaphor that I call "the invisible ship on the horizon," which was used to frame a story, during her narrative interview, about how people can't see something that exists unless they are aware of it. Her story interprets aspects of her own identity in the process of its telling:

. . . people have limitations of what they can expect and their entire worldview is colored by that . . . my favorite story of that is about a bunch of explorers who were off the shore of Tierra del Fuego in this huge Spanish ship with sails . . . [the explorers] were watching a group of [indigenous people] on the shore [but were] getting no response. Finally, a bunch of them get into a little boat and paddled over to the shore. The people on the shore [were shocked and exclaimed], "oh my god, where did you come from?" They couldn't see a ship there . . . it was beyond their capacity to comprehend it, so they visually couldn't see it. A shaman whose world was more open [was taken] to the ship and back. He explained it to the people . . . suddenly the ship appeared on the horizon.

One can interpret many aspects of Diana's worldview and sense of identity from her story. Gergen (1993), suggests that in the telling of self-narratives, "we use story form to identify ourselves to others and to ourselves" (p. 17). Diana locates her interpreted self-identity implicitly in the story as being a person who is "aware" of more in life beyond the mundane aspects of everyday reality by being able to "see the ship" on the horizon.

Another example of a worldview metaphor acting as a self-interpretation of identity emerged in Laurel's interview during her narrative discussion of her emotional pain from childhood and its eventually becoming her "armor" through self-healing. Laurel's understanding of her mission in life is that she is a healer and a therapist. Her worldview regarding emotional healing as an integral aspect of healthy human life is framed in her self-protecting "armor" metaphor.

Chorie used a metaphor of a mountain to express her worldview belief regarding a cosmic/spiritual force in human life. She asks, "how are you going to argue with a mountain . . . it's a given . . . it just IS!" Chorie's interpreted sense of self is that she is one who can't help but see the "mountain," as if her recognition of self as a cosmic/spiritual being had tangible, static form. In her interpreted reality of self, she wonders why others argue about this aspect of human life when it seems experientially so real for her. An obvious way to understand Chorie's use of the "mountain" metaphor in the expression of her self-identity is the idea that she perceives the spiritual side of her life as having an enormous influence. Chorie interprets this context so strongly in her everyday life it has almost the visual impact of a large mountain in a landscape.

Sonny's worldview metaphor consisted of his frequent use of the term, "immortality projects." His perception of people in general is that they are purpose-seeking beings who "don't very well accept their mortality . . . we create immortality projects, so that we can go on living, so that life will be worthwhile . . . we need to know that there's some bigger purpose." The immortality project metaphor acts as a self-perceptual interpretive mechanism in that Sonny expresses his belief in the finality of human life: "we are just animals who are here to eat, shit, reproduce, and die." According to Alasuutari (1997), a discursive approach in life story construction suggests that personality can be understood "as an accounting strategy for maintaining continuity and saving face" (p. 2). Sonny framed his comments in reaction to the context of an astrological interpretive framework for which he has no belief or knowledge; thereby, he resorted to strategies of reality maintenance such as "astrology is not an immortality project that I've got anything

invested in" and "I'm just not willing to turn over self-determination to any kind of what I call an immortality project." Harré and Gillett (1994), view the sense of self as a "discursive self" who in the process of identity formation:

is located in space, literally a point of view . . . a social place, a location in a manifold of persons . . . to have a sense of self is to have a sense of being quadruply located, of having a place in four coordinated manifolds. I experience myself not as an entity but as having a place from which I perceive, act, and am acted upon and where I am myself perceived . . . the mind of any human being is constituted by the discourses that they are involved in, private and public . . . We can turn to study how a person's sense of being uniquely located is discursively displayed. (pp. 103-104)

Sonny's self-narrative comments on the issues that represented "immortality projects" to him were embedded within a discursive interaction. The interpretive framework of an astrological perspective in human life discursively challenged his interpreted location, which was outside that viewpoint. The metaphor of the "immortality projects" allowed both the researcher and the co-researcher to discursively locate some common ground upon which to interact.

A worldview metaphor that described the parameters of people's belief systems such as a "box" or a "ship" was used in several self-narratives. Helena referred to the limitations people interpret about self and others to be like self-contained "ships" such as "it has cost me the friendship of people who wanted to stay in their ships . . . because I won't ever think they need to stay there or who want me to stay in my ship." For Helena,

the idea that people tend to be uncomfortable stepping outside familiar cultural experiences was interpreted by her as creating limitations derived from the shape or size of their self-created "ships." A similar concept was discussed by Diana in regard to the limiting factor of people's worldviews such as, "my son says, how big is your box . . . what box are you in, and how big is it?" Diana utilizes the metaphor of the "box" to frame her interpretation of the parameters of others' worldviews.

Recognition of a Socially Embedded Self

People's interpretations of their self-identity roles change in relational interactions between others. Social construction accounts for the phenomena of our different selves in our various interpersonal relationships. The social constructionist viewpoint stipulates that our understanding of the world "grows from relationship, and is embedded not within individual minds but within interpretive or communal traditions" (Gergen, 1999, p. 122). According to Burr (1995), when we interact with others "our talk and behavior is a joint effort, not the product of internal forces" (p. 28). Personality interpreted from a social construction perspective focuses on the idea that we "create rather than discover ourselves and other people" (Burr, 1995, pp. 28-29). In relational interaction, there is a creative co-constructive interpretive process in the communication between people "as something contingently dynamic and unfolding in interactional time (Jacoby & Ochs, 1995, p. 179). Each individual in communicative interaction simultaneously acts upon the other and is in turn acted upon by the other within a network of co-constructed interpretations. An understanding of self, accordingly, develops intersubjectively and is intrinsically linked to an understanding of others (Semin, 1990, p. 160). As human

beings, we are born into social and cultural environments, and as such, we are always immersed in a social medium; saturated with social selves (Gergen, 1991). There is no way to remove our selves from the pervasive flow of social influence in our creation and evolution of an interpreted self. It is inherent in the constitutive nature of human communication.

The final emergent theme from the narrative interviews relates to the recognition of each co-researcher acting as a socially embedded self. According to Pearce (1995), we are "story-telling and story-living entities who both respond to and create" ourselves in conversation with social others (p. 107). When the co-researchers talked about themselves, it was often in context to their conversations with others. The creation of self appeared to evolve in an interpretive co-constructed manner such as Marsha's reflections about being enthusiastic about the information shared in her astrological consultation and wanting to talk with friends about it. Her boyfriend's disinterest in the astrological information acted to curtail Marsha's initial exuberance: "If I was interacting with [my boyfriend] who doesn't have a lot of faith in it, then I'd put it down and do something else and didn't think about it." In contrast, Marsha's attitude toward the astrological information changed somewhat; "if there was someone willing to discuss it" with her, then she would get enthusiastic again. It appeared that Marsha's sense of self-identity in regard to being comfortable with the new information was contingent upon others' reactions in the process of constituting her self realities: "I found that had a big effect on how much thought I was willing to put into it . . . unless there was somebody willing to give me feedback about it." Marsha's self-narratives in relation to her own actions and

reactions were co-constructed through constitutive relational interaction. Gergen (1999) frames the viewpoint of the creation of self as a relational self "in which our every action manifests our immersion in past relationships, and simultaneously the stamp of the relationship into which we move" (p. 131). Marsha's process of interpretation of her "willing[ness] to discuss it" influenced the way she chose to interact with others in regard to the astrological information because it was outside the mundane cultural setting of everyday interaction.

Our stories about ourselves often reflect others' interpretations of us. Helena's self-narrative comments about her self-identity act as a mirror to the interpretations of her friends: "Some of the women I know really well describe me as someone who has a bit of the trickster in her." In contrast, Chorie recognizes that her sense of self-identity has been influenced in an emotionally unhealthy way by her parents' interpretations of "who" she should be, "instead of this person that my parents think I should be or those that love me think I should be." She admits that her self-identity for most of her adult life has fluctuated in response to others' inaccurate interpretations and expectations rather than who she intrinsically feels herself to be. She has constituted a self troubled by the expectations others place on her in interaction. Laurel brought up the relational interaction with her mother regarding her process of identity creation: "it was my Mom that wounded me and helped me be who I am," thus she directly acknowledged her mother's participation in her self-identity interpretations and process.

Diana told stories about others that described something she was aware of about herself or would be true of her lived experiences such as:

A very wise friend of mine back when I was in my twenties was hearing me talk about my personal insecurities. She was in her forties at the time, she looked at me and said, "oh, I understand you're worried what people think about you," and I said yes. Well, she said, "at twenty you worry about what people think about you. At forty you don't give a damn if people think about you. And at sixty you realize—people don't think about you!"

Diana's story about her friend illustrates how much she has been influenced over the years by her friend's insightful comments. She utilized stories about her co-constructed interactions with others that revealed aspects of her interpretations of self-identity.

Diana's understanding of self is grounded in interaction with others in her life, which centralizes communication within "human relationship" as the basis for meaning-making (Gergen, 1994, p. 263). Her perceptions of self were interpreted through a co-constructive process of constitutive relational interaction.

Summary

The stories of the six co-researchers' interpreted lived experience from their narrative interviews laid the foundation for their co-constructed interpersonal perceptions of self within an astrological consultation and narrative interview. The selected self-narratives created a pattern of emergent thematic synthesis, which was interwoven into another story, whose fabric was constructed of socially derived interpretations between an astrological practitioner/researcher and client/co-researcher interaction. The narratives of self from the interviews created a "history of the self," whereby the co-researchers could contextualize their "personal myths" in the process of an interpretive construction of self

(McAdams. 1993, p. 102). The pilot study with a cultural stranger and non-believer to an astrological interpretive frame of reference set the stage for this more expansive exploration of meaning-making between co-constructed selves.

The enacted emergent themes regarding the cultural stranger/insider standpoint, worldview metaphors, and recognition of a socially embedded self serve to illustrate the socially constructed interpretive function of stories about the self in the creation of self-identity. The creation and evolution of self-identity is never a singular process of self interpretation, but is a multi-layered process of interactive, intersubjective interpretations, which arise in and are fostered by relational discourse.

The consultation narrative illustrates the constitution of identity in interaction with an other who is afforded the status of "professional" regarding the interaction itself. Like therapeutic interactions between self and health caregivers or between self and mental health practitioners, the interaction between consultant and the astrological information seeker is a context unusually sensitive to the information that makes self visible to the evolution of identity. Such interaction carries a cultural expectation of the constitutive nature and power of communication.

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APPENDIX A

Informed Consent Form

Ethical guidelines of privacy, no coercion, informed consent, confidentiality, protection from harm, sharing results, debriefing, sharing benefits, and ensuring high ethical standards will be strictly followed in this study. Your participation in the study is entirely voluntary and you may withdraw at any time. Your name will not be used in any report or paper. A pseudonym will be used for the narrative story from your interview. Strict guidelines for participant confidentiality and impartiality are being adhered to as well as a respect for all persons regardless of gender, age, race, ethnicity, or sexual orientation.

The research project will explore the narratives of the experiences of individuals who have had an astrological consultation with a competent professional astrologer. You are being asked to spend approximately one to two hours of your time initially for an astrological consultation and an additional hour of your time (several weeks later) telling your story of your experience of making sense of the information from the consultation. The interview will be audio recorded for transcription and qualitative analysis. The audio tape will be destroyed directly following the transcription process. There are no apparent risks involved in the research process to participants or researcher nor any anticipated circumstances where you will be terminated from the project by the researcher, but if any should arise in the research process, you will be promptly notified. If for any reason you wish to withdraw from the study while it is in progress, simply notify me by email or by mail at the addresses listed below. There is no penalty for early withdrawal.

By reading and signing this form, you agree to participate in this study and understand the ethical guidelines listed above (you will be reimbursed for the U.S. postage necessary to mail this form when a copy of your signed informed consent form is mailed back to you).

NAME: _____

ADDRESS: _____

(address is optional: this consent form can be photocopied when delivered in person and returned to you then or it can be mailed to you if you mail it in.)

CONTACT TELEPHONE #: _____

(needed to set appointments for consultation and interview)

Thank you for your interest and participation in this research project. A copy of the research results will be mailed to you at your request.

If you have any questions please contact me at my office:

Researcher:	Jean Richey
Office telephone:	474-1876
Email:	fsjar7@uaf.edu
Office:	Rm. 401, Department of Communication, University of Alaska Fairbanks

Sincerely,
Jean A. Richey, Graduate student,
University of Alaska Fairbanks, Department of Communication

APPENDIX B

Astrological Signs & Keywords Reference

<u>Zodiacal Sign</u>	<u>Element</u>	<u>Quality</u>	<u>Keyword</u>	<u>Key Concept</u> ¹	<u>Expression</u> ²
Aries	Fire	Cardinal	I am	Single-pointed release of energy toward new experience	Self-willed urge for action, self-assertion
Taurus	Earth	Fixed	I have	Depth of appreciation related to immediate physical sensations	Possessive, retentive, steadiness
Gemini	Air	Mutable	I think	Immediate perception and verbalization of all connections	Changeable curiosity, talkative, friendliness
Cancer	Water	Cardinal	I feel	Instinctive nurturing and protective empathy	Feeling, reserve, moods sensitivity, self-protection
Leo	Fire	Fixed	I shine	Sustained warmth of loyalty and radiant vitalization	Pride/urge for recognition, sense of drama
Virgo	Earth	Mutable	I analyze	Spontaneous helpfulness, humility, and need to serve	Perfectionism, analysis, fine discrimination
Libra	Air	Cardinal	I balance	Harmonization of all polarities for self-completion	Balance, impartiality, tact, diplomacy
Scorpio	Water	Fixed	I desire	Penetration through intense emotional power	Compulsive desire, depth, controlled passion, secrecy
Sagittarius	Fire	Mutable	I seek	Restless aspiration toward an ideal	Beliefs, generalizations, ideals
Capricorn	Earth	Cardinal	I organize	Impersonal determination to accomplish	Self-control, caution, reserve and ambition
Aquarius	Air	Fixed	I know	Detached coordination of all people and concepts	Individualistic freedom, extremism
Pisces	Water	Mutable	I perceive	Healing compassion for all that suffers	Soul-yearnings, idealism, oneness, inspiration

<u>Planets</u>	<u>General Interpretations</u>	<u>Functions of Planets</u> ³
Sun	Purpose, individuality, energy, self authority, light	How one is (tone of being) and how one experiences life and expresses one's individuality
Moon	Receptive, nurturing, sensitive, moody, mother, emotion	How one reacts based on subconscious predisposition
Mercury	Communication, logic, intelligence, detachment	How one thinks and communicates
Venus	Beauty, love, harmony, sensuality, values, intimacy	How one expresses affection, feels appreciated, and gives of self
Mars	Assertive, vitality, sexuality anger, ego, conflict	How one asserts self and expresses desires
Jupiter	Expansion, justice, truth, optimism excess, exaggeration	How one seeks to grow, improve oneself, and experience trust in life
Saturn	Time, karma, limitation, discipline, delay, frustration, father	How one seeks to establish and preserve self through effort
Uranus	Intuition, inspiration, nonconformist, erratic, sudden, electricity	Transformative energy toward liberation from limitation
Neptune	Vision, mystic, idealism, escapism, spiritual, victim/martyr/savior	Transformative energy toward awareness of spirit
Pluto	Regeneration, manipulation, control, death, release, new beginnings	Transformative energy toward elimination and renewal

¹key concepts, ² expressions, and ³ functions of planets adapted from:

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